



# Action

by

# Christians

*All that is  
required for the  
triumph of evil is  
that good men do  
nothing*

# Against

# torture

Nov/Dec 2014/Jan 2015

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Dear Members

I am sure, like me, you are saddened at the news these days, there never seems to be good news. Wars, murders, terrorist attacks, illnesses. Regularly at my church we prayer specifically for these situations, and also for named prisoners on a Thursday morning. I often wonder what the use is, does it do any good? Every third Sunday at the Mass we also have the laying on of hands for the sick. We have two people lay their hands on the person asking for intercession and pray for their healing.

But does it do any good?

In the New Testament there is a strong connection between prayer and action. Jesus taught that there was no use in praying for a hungry person if you weren't going to do anything about feeding him. You cannot eat prayer!

For us today, there is a strong connection between the **thinking** and the **doing**, prayer and action. Sadly nowadays, there are still Churches that not only do nothing for those being tortured but also do not pray for them either.

When I joined the ACAT committee nearly 18 years ago it was a hope that we would get every church in the UK to be aware of ACAT and the need to **pray** and **act** on behalf of those who are tortured today. We have a very long way to go.

This mailing is being published some weeks before Advent due to the need to get our Christmas Greetings card list to our members efficiently so they can pass it to other church members, their family and their friends and colleagues.

Advent is a time of preparation to remember the coming of Christ. The Christmas story reminds us that God did not just think we were worth doing something for; he actually came in person and did it. It means that God had a high regard for humanity, enough to become flesh himself. As Jesus taught his disciples (John 13) "As I have done it to you so you must do it to others" so it is impossible for anyone who calls themselves Christian **not** to be proactive in the 'caring for others campaign such as the Christmas Greetings Card action.

I have no idea where I heard this joke but it has always made me stop and think about my faith.

- What do you call Santa's little helpers? The answer to which was 'subordinate clauses'-

We need especially at this time of year to remember the many who are subordinate to the fancies and sadism of others, so we may be obedient and subordinate to the will of God, and as willing instruments in his hand may we be the means by which peace and security are achieved on earth, for the benefit of others and to the glory of His Holy Name.

With best wishes and love for Advent, Christmas and the New Year

*Margaret*

### **Christian Resource Exhibition in Exeter**

As advised in our last mailing, we are taking a leap of faith and having a stand at the Christian Resource Exhibition in February. The actual dates are 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of February 2015.

Why the leap of faith? Well we need people to man the stand and having a small committee means we must rely on our membership to assist us. It is not arduous and can be good fun. You just need to be able to talk to people about ACAT's aims and hand literature out. We can assist you with what to say.

Last time we were in Exeter several members from the surrounding area came to assist us for which we were very grateful. If you can do so again, we would be even more grateful.

Even if you are only able to help for a couple of hours to relieve others for lunch or coffee that would help.

If you are already helping on another stand no problem, or if you are visiting just drop by and say hello.

## **IRAQI CHRISTIANS**

As many members know Professor the Lord David Alton is one of our Patrons. He is very knowledgeable about Human Rights and has a lot of articles published in the media. He is presently in Japan and Korea speaking about the Human Rights of children in orphanages.

One of his articles is very pertinent to a recent campaign we put in a mailing about the plight of Christians in Iraq.

We sought his permission to publish it in full and we have drafted a letter which should be sent to our Prime Minister, David Cameron.

Please would you write this appeal and send any replies to the Office.

### **The world must respond to the cry of Iraq's Christians**

The faithful in Iraq still pray in Aramaic, the language of Jesus .

The last Christian has now been expelled from Mosul. The light of religious freedom, along with the entire Christian presence, has been extinguished in the Bible's "great city of Nineveh" – the centre of Christianity in Iraq for two millennia. This follows the uncompromising ultimatum by the jihadists of Isis to convert or die.

On Sunday Pope Francis expressed his profound anguish: "Our brothers are persecuted, they are cast out, and they are forced to leave their homes without having the chance to take anything with them." The UN Security Council has denounced these crimes but we desperately need to do more.

Before pitilessly exiling the Christians on foot, Isis stole everything they had – homes, businesses, cars, money and even wedding rings, sometimes with the ring fingers attached. Churches have all been destroyed, shuttered or turned into mosques.

Isis has taken a sledgehammer to the tomb of Jonah, replaced the cross with the black Islamic flag on top of Mosul's St Ephrem's cathedral, and beheaded or crucified any Muslim who dared to dissent.

Even before the arrival of Isis, targeted persecution of Iraq's Christians, who still pray in Aramaic, the language of Jesus, was ignored. The numbers in Mosul have gone from 30,000 to zero.

Iraq is now a disintegrating failed state. The only people who have successfully withstood Isis are the Kurdish Peshmerga forces. To their credit, the Kurdish leadership has been generously offering safe haven to Mosul's fleeing Christians and has asked for international aid to help it do so. This crisis justifies huge humanitarian and resettlement aid that could include micro and business loans to help people to help themselves. The West must also press the Gulf to end the funding of Isis.

Overall the world must wake up urgently to the plight of the ancient churches throughout the region which are faced with the threat of mass murder and mass displacement. The UN claims it has "a duty to protect", while Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, born in the embers of the Holocaust, insists that each of us must be free to follow our own beliefs.

The religious cleansing and unspeakable bigotry at work in Mosul makes hateful mockery of both.

David Alton published in The Times

Last updated at 12:01AM, July 23 2014

Lord Alton of Liverpool is a crossbench peer and a one of our Patrons

To email: Type into Google the phrase: 'Contact the Prime Minister'- this gives the format in which you type your message and send it in that format

Or post to: Rt Hon David Cameron, 10 Downing Street, London, SW1A 2AA

Please send a copy to your own MP and let us have any replies

Dear Prime Minister

I am writing to ask if the UK would allow more Iraqi Christian refugees into this country. They have been targeted by Islamic extremists because of the West's military intervention in Iraq and we clearly have a responsibility to help them.

Australia and France have expressed willingness to grant the Iraqi Christians and Yazidis visas for asylum as refugees. We should surely do the same, especially for the most vulnerable, the sick, the very young and old as well as the disabled. We are, after all, an officially Christian country.

Thank you

Yours faithfully

#### ELECTION NEWS

Following the AGM last month we can announce that:-

Margaret Russell was re-elected as Chairman

Ray Dunnett will continue as Treasurer and Membership Secretary

Ken Watson will continue as Secretary and Prisoner Support Coordinator

Peter Dixon will continue as Publicity and Media

Brother Anselm will continue as S O S Coordinator

Richard Dent, Kevin Burr (who will continue as J & P link) and Audrey Wells (Death Penalty) will remain on the committee and we welcome Janet Norwood who was also elected. She will let us know a little of her background in the next mailing

## Using the Card list

Several members asked last year how the card list could be used in Church. Here are 2 suggestions which are tried and tested, there are many other ways:-

### **First suggestion:**

I have been asked to describe how I introduce ACAT Christmas card sending to my church congregation.

I ask the Parish Administrator to make 10 copies of each list (30 of the Introductory page) and I place these on the church Welcome Table (I always take more copies myself to church as back up).

I also ask her for 3 weeks (from late November to early December) to insert the following notice in the church service sheet and weekly email:

### **“ACTION BY CHRISTIANS AGAINST TORTURE”**

Receiving a Christmas card means a great deal to a prisoner of conscience. It can be like a candle in a dark cell. ACAT has prepared lists (of usually 3 prisoners’ names and their prisons) which are at the back of the church on the Welcome Table. If you would like to send a card please take a list and choose a prisoner - or more if you like.

Three 1<sup>st</sup> class stamps and AIRMAIL written on the back of the envelope will suffice for postage unless you are near a Post Office. Thank you”

During Notices at the service I tell the congregation that ACAT has prepared these lists again and thank the congregation for sending cards in the past. I mainly repeat the contents of the above message and point out that it is important to send non-religious cards to prisoners who are so indicated on the lists. I suggest they take one page and choose one prisoner on it, but usually people tell me they have written to all three prisoners. Some of them take copies of all the lists. (They are less likely to take copies of the page with organisations on it). After the service I stand by the Welcome Table and answer any questions.

I do not provide the cards or the stamps. I have found that the sending these cards is something that the congregation enjoy doing and usually most of the lists are taken.

## **Second suggestion:-**

For the last 2 weeks in November I hold a card signing after church during coffee. I have 2 tables laid out, one for religious cards, one for non religious cards.

On each table I have the cards appertaining to the need. These cards are sourced from an appeal put out to the congregation in the weeks leading up to the event.

I also put slips of paper with the details of the prisoner or organisation concerned. I have a box for the cards and another for donations in the region of £1.50. I also supply pens.

When the card is written and the donation paid I ask that the slip be taken home and attached to the fridge door or similar and the named person be prayed for during Advent.

I then take the cards to the Post Office to send. To date I have never been short of money to pay for the cards and very often there is a little left.

Some members of the congregation take a card list home to send cards, but this is not obligatory.

I have found sending cards this way means that the effort of going to the Post Office has been removed so leaving no reason for not participating.

**We would be keen to know how other people use this list so please let us know for the next mailing.**

## REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

**Sami Essid, Tunisia:** Arrested by anti-terrorist brigade August 20, 2014, Sami Essid was tortured for three days, until he signed a confession under duress. His physical and psychological state today is very worrying and he is also likely to be convicted on the basis of forced confessions.

**DINA MEZZA, HONDURAS** On 28 May 2014, award-winning journalist Dina Meza published news about the murder of a political activist on her Facebook page. Despite reporting the incidents, the authorities have failed to investigate them or protect Dina and her family. I

Iraqi Christian refugees into this country. They have been targeted by Islamic extremists because of the West's military intervention in Iraq

**Journalists** in danger who work in war torn countries or who investigate difficult human rights situations worldwide

All those mentioned in our Christmas Greetings Card list either as prisoners, Human Rights workers or Human Rights workers.

For the work of Freedom from Torture in this country

For the people of North Korea many of whom suffer through hunger and abuse and who may not be able to practise their religion.

For ACAT's Prisoner Support work that we are able to expand into other countries

For the work of the SOS Campaign without which many would be in imminent danger of abuse and no one would be aware of it.

## *Lord Jesus*

*You endured ill-treatment, torture and a violent death,  
although you had done no wrong,  
Be with those who suffer at the hands of the torturers.  
Grant that in the midst of their suffering, they may know  
they are not alone.*

*Give them renewed strength and hope,  
and an end to their suffering and their despair.  
If it is your will bring them freedom.  
Be with the families of all who suffer harsh imprisonment and  
torture.*

*Bring them, in the pain of not knowing what has happened  
to their loved ones,  
the knowledge that all are held in your loving arms*

*Amen*

## PRISONER SUPPORT NOTES

I have been trying to make contact with someone who is actually based in Zimbabwe who might be able to give some advice concerning the establishment of a Prisoner Support Scheme, which would involve the exchange of letters and cards between members and those held in custody. It has been explained to me that perhaps the political situation that exists in that Country may preclude the operation of such a Scheme, and so, before trying to explore the penal system that operates there, I am contacting the Head of the Mission of the Vatican City in Harare, Archbishop George Kocherry, to see what his feelings are concerning the Scheme that we have in mind.

If the response that I receive is disheartening, then I would like to explore the situation of supporting prisoners in the Country that was formerly known as Burma. The Burma Campaign UK has available a letter writing guide that has case studies of political prisoners, their addresses and contact details for British, European and Burmese government officials who can be contacted.

I feel that all I can do is to continue with the Zimbabwe project and see what transpires from my initial contact and then, if necessary to establish a relationship with the Burma Campaign people.

I hope that things will have been clarified by the time the next edition of the Newsletter is issued. If any members have any suggestions or ideas concerning Prisoner Support matters generally, I would be very pleased to hear from them.

Ken Watson,  
Co-ordinator

34, Wantage Road, Reading RG30 2SF.

Email: [ken335@btinternet.com](mailto:ken335@btinternet.com)

## JOURNALISTS IN DANGER

The recent horrific deaths of James Foley and Stephen Sotloff at the hands of ISIS in Syria have highlighted the dangers faced by journalists in reporting on human rights abuses in war and peace. In May the Independent reported that since the war in Syria had begun 65 journalists had been killed there. John Owen, a professor of journalism, has said that kidnapping “has succeeded in making Syria so dangerous to report on that only rarely now can journalists get any safe access to bear witness to this humanitarian disaster”.

Syria is not the only place where journalists face danger and religious extremists are not the only threat. Journalists may also be in danger from the state or criminal gangs. In a previous newsletter we mentioned the disappearance of the journalist Prageeth Eknaligoda in Sri Lanka who has not been seen since 2010. The organisation Reporters Without Borders (RWB) says that, since 2000, more than 80 journalists have been killed in Mexico where reporting the drugs wars or political corruption brings a risk of being kidnapped, tortured and murdered. RWB has been teaching reporters methods to prevent potential attackers from knowing where they are but journalists continue to disappear. Ahmet Rilwan, who wrote about politics, criminal gangs and Islamic extremism for the *Minivan news* in the Maldives, has not been seen since early August this year.

Journalists’ activities may lead to a risk of imprisonment. For instance this July Jason Rezaian, a reporter with the Washington Post, and his wife, Yaganeh Saleh, correspondent for the United Arab Emirates, were arrested without explanation in Iran. Yaganeh Saleh was released early in October but her husband is still in prison at the time of writing.

In August it was reported that 4 journalists in Burma are serving a ten year gaol sentence with hard labour because they claimed to have uncovered a secret chemical weapons factory run by former generals. Their arrest was ordered by President Thein Sein, (seen by many as a reformer), and the Burmese government said that the report was “baseless”. However it has so far failed to open the military facility to other reporters so that the story could be checked.

Better known, probably, is the case of 3 journalists employed by Al-Jazeera, Baher Mohammed, Peter Greste and Mohamed Fahmy, who were arrested and tried in Egypt in June for “falsifying news reports” and sentenced for up to ten years in prison. They were accused of trying to bring about the downfall of the Egyptian state in order to advance the Muslim Brotherhood. The latter organisation had been elected to power in Egypt but was deposed in a military coup. However the Brotherhood was supported by Qatar which owns Al-Jazeera and the trial of the three journalists (and others *in absentia*) may be the result of a political quarrel between Qatar and the current Egyptian government.

The countries which have the worst record of gaoling journalists cover a wide geographical range. Turkey is often cited as having more journalists in gaol than any other country and journalists often fall victim to Turkish laws criminalising defamation, including “insulting Turkishness”. This is seen by the Turkish government as a violation of anti-terror laws but these can be defined very widely to include criticism of the government or apparent sympathy with Kurdish separatists.

The Committee to Protect Journalists, based in New York, has said that Turkey, China and Iran accounted for more than half the 211 journalists behind bars in December 2013. The rest of the ten worst countries were Eritrea, Syria, Vietnam, Ethiopia, Egypt, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan.

One journalist whose plight has received international prominence is Eskinder Nega, sentenced in 2012 in Ethiopia under anti-terrorism laws to 18 years imprisonment. In fact, although he had criticised the government, all he had done was to call for freedom of speech in Ethiopia.

Sometimes attacks on journalists may be the result of undercover state activity or the activities of illegal gangs which may be cooperating with state. It can be difficult to tell who the culprit is and, particularly in an authoritarian state, very difficult to find out.

In April, for instance, there was an attempt to murder a Pakistani journalist, Hamid Mir, when gunmen pulled up alongside his car as he was driving into Karachi from the airport, peppering him with bullets.

He survived but needed emergency surgery. This was not the first attempt to kill him but, as a journalist and the host of a popular chat show, he had become increasingly critical of Islamic militants and also of the activities of Pakistan's security forces who some suspect of being behind the attack on him. The Committee to Protect Journalists has said that 53 journalists have been murdered in Pakistan since 1992.

Probably the best known example of a journalist murdered in mysterious circumstances is that of Anna Politovskaya, who worked for *Novaya Gazeta* and was shot dead in 2006 outside her home in Moscow after charting abuses by Russian forces in Chechnya. In June this year five men, most of them Chechens, were sentenced for the murder. It had become clear in their trial that this had been a contract killing but not who had ordered it. Some suspect that responsibility might lie with Politovskaya's enemies in Chechnya itself but she was very critical of Mr Putin's human rights record and there is also deep suspicion that the state might have ordered her death, a charge which Mr Putin denies. Outside Russia the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) agreed that the case would not be closed until "those who ordered this horrific murder are identified and convicted". In the words of the organisation's media rights advocate, the case is a reminder that "impunity for crimes against journalists is still commonplace in several countries"

This article was sent in by John Davies of the Harrow Group

## **SOS TORTURE**

I was sad not to have been at the AGM and thus miss the annual chance of meeting up with SOS members. During October we have appealed on behalf of Human Rights activists in the Russian Federation, Bahrain, Burma, Philippines and Iran. It's very much an act of faith - at the very least it brings to the attention of offending regimes that nothing can be hidden from the eyes of the world. Coupled with the work of prayer for victims and oppressors, we believe that we do make a difference! So, keep it up - and if you're an ACAT member willing to go an extra mile, do let me know

Anselm.

## **TORTURE --- FREEDOM FROM and SOURCE OF**

### **FREEDOM FROM ...**

The Conference following the Annual General Meeting in Bristol on 11<sup>th</sup> October was varied, very informative and frightening. Yes, all three!

Grace Wiltshire, from Freedom From Torture (formerly known as the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture), spoke of the vital work done in five centres in the UK. She began with a case study of Amir, from Afghanistan, whose brother was killed by the Taliban.

In an overview of the work and history of the charity she emphasised the important part played by the founder Helen Bamber, who, at the age of 20 was deeply moved by what she saw at Belsen Concentration Camp at the end of World War 2. She worked with survivors of the holocaust and determined to help all victims of cruelty, if possible. She set up the Medical Foundation in 1985; its object today is the same as it was then, although the name has changed: the rehabilitation of victims of torture and ill-treatment.

When tortured, a person can lose his or her identity, begin to doubt who they are, and believe they are not the same person as they were before the torture. Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the UN called torture 'an instrument of terror'.

The charity produces medico/legal reports which are vital when victims of torture are being considered for repatriation to the country where the torture took place. They deal with all aspects of a person's rehabilitation, not just the psychological. This care includes their present poverty, provision of food, clothing, cleaning materials and very survival. They also publish country reports on torture and ill-treatment.

In Bristol, Grace said there is a drop-in welcome centre, giving legal advice, short-term accommodation help and classes in art, language and design. Many victims from abroad find our medical system and how to become part of it a real problem and Freedom from Torture volunteers help with this also. Volunteers also go into schools and explain the charity's work.

## SOURCE OF....

A totally different and frightening aspect of torture and human cruelty was detailed by our second speaker Steve Goddard, who was formerly Treasurer of ACAT - UK. He has been to North Korea some seven times over the years, and was planning to go again during October.

The state was founded in 1948 and has been a so-called secret society ever since. There are huge statues of the founder of the state and the present leader Kim Jong-un in Pyongyang, the capital, and people, old and young, are persuaded to come and virtually worship their state idols.

Some members of the ruling class, much of it military, are rich but by far the majority of the population are extremely poor, although the country has an estimated £4trillion of untapped mineral wealth.

Torture is endemic in the camps where many thousands of 'dissidents' are held. Steve showed drawings made by prisoners of the methods of torture used. There are very few legal trials before victims are sent to one of the camps, which are in many places throughout the country. And once a person is a prisoner there, it is a virtual certainty they will never be allowed to leave. A few have escaped to tell of the appalling cruelty and inhumanity practised by the camp guards on men, women and children.

We saw photos of court rooms where so-called 'trials' are held, although the rule is that once a person is charged and brought to court they are presumed guilty, unlike almost any other country.

Many families have been split up because of relatives being in both North and South Korea. Very rarely are there meetings allowed between these relatives. However, an inhabitant of North Korea is never allowed to leave the country to live with members of his/her family in the South.

There are four Christian churches in Pyongyang, all very strictly licensed and supervised by the communist government, but one observer has written positively that 'God is doing great miracles in North Korea'.

# *Meditation and Prayer.*

Be still and know that I am God.

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

All things come from you, and of your own do we give you.

## **Prayers**

Almighty God-in the stillness of your universe, in the quiet that appears between the stars, You are. You are the "I am", who knows all things and all people; may your presence permeate prisons, where people are being tortured.

May the words of our Lord Jesus, the Christ, be available to them and the gift of your Holy Spirit bring comfort, peace and fruitfulness to lives that are otherwise interrupted by pain, discomfort or despair.

Jesus, you who were discomforted for our sake help us to direct our thoughts and prayers, according to your guidance, at people, countries and governments, where we may best be of help.

Through the many earthly organisations set up by mankind, may you raise up wise and merciful leaders and executives, who will follow the heart of love and compassion for their fellow humans, rather than the hard heart of self-will and self-interest.

Lord, we confess our weakness, indecisiveness and dallying to act whilst others suffer. By your help, may we so order our lives, to put your Will first, and in so doing, apply ourselves to the mundane tasks before us, which will fly quickly when done with your Grace, leaving us more time for you.

We bring before you, into your glorious Light, any appeals we have taken up; we pray for success in our campaigns, and for more prisoners to be released.

Also, we thank you dear Lord, for all the people who work with prisoners who have suffered physically or mentally, or have unseen scars, and pray for you to heal them.

Father, please bring to our notice all those you know we can help or who need us in any other way such as by visiting, letter-writing or campaigning for them to their governments and those in authority over them.

Especially, we pray against warmongers and arms manufacturers, who do not consider the lives of those people far away, who suffer because of their intentions, but only see the money before their eyes.

Dear Jesus, we offer you these prayers in the sure knowledge that you are a good and generous God, who has so much "loving kindness".

May we be instrumental in spreading this across your world.

Amen.

#### Remember

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,  
no hands but yours, no feet but yours;  
yours are the eyes through which to look  
at Christ's compassion to the world,  
yours are the feet with which to go  
about doing good,  
and yours are the hands  
with which he is to bless us now

St. Teresa of Avila

# A final Thought '

*The ACAT  
Committee wish you  
all a blessed Advent,  
Peaceful Christmas  
and a Very Happy  
New Year*

We hope you find this mailing stimulating and thought provoking

Articles for the next and future mailings are always required. Especially it would be good to hear about individuals or group activities, any good news about prisoners or any queries you may have about the work of ACAT (UK).

Please send any material - handwritten, or typed to:-

Margaret Russell, c/o ACAT Office or by e-mail by 25<sup>th</sup> January

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